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# Design and Preservation Work Group

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## **What is this topic?**

In Baltimore historic preservation has led many successful neighborhood revitalization efforts, enhanced many economic development projects, and preserved Baltimore's character in the face of dramatic change. Today, Baltimore has more historic districts than any other city in the Country, providing Baltimore with the rare opportunity to distinguish itself as the most historic city in America.

Some of the newer construction projects, mostly built after WWII, detract from the historic character of the surrounding community. These projects were generally constructed following strict zoning requirements, especially zoning's bulk regulations. Often times there are historic building patterns that are compromised when there are certain types of new construction and rehabilitation projects that would detract from or destroy the historic character of these neighborhoods.

## **How do current approaches impact development?**

The current zoning code lacks design standards and often has bulk regulations that lead to buildings that are out of character with the existing built context, historic or otherwise.

## **What issues with the current approach should TransForm Baltimore help address?**

Parking Regulations are often a prohibition to reuse of historic structures.

Parking is currently not part of FAR. This tends to create an unpredictable increase in building massing where projects involve large parking garages.

There is a lack of design standards within the zoning code; this is especially problematic for parking garages and other structures that are not typically friendly to the street.

Often the bulk regulations for new construction encourage demolition of historic structures to allow increase in building mass.

Sometimes the current regulations do not permit new construction that is identical to what exists in a given area.

There are often multiple layers of standard that impact areas such as downtown, zoning, urban renewal and historic districts. This situation makes redevelopment confusing and not predictable.

There are areas of the City where the zoning does not permit the mix of uses that would be expected from the given structures.

### **What proposed approaches should be considered during the TransForm Baltimore process?**



- 1) Zoning rules should more clearly match what is on the ground in preservation areas.
- 2) There is a challenge in defining character? Is it physical/architectural, mix of uses, and/or private space vs. public spaces and streetscape?
- 3) Given the importance of the street as a place, is it a problem to have zoning lines split at streets vs. at alleys?
- 4) A new zoning code should consider minimum building heights and build-to lines on streets significant streets. And consider other ways to maintain street character, use, design and vibrancy. In addition curb cuts should be prohibited or minimized on significant streets.
- 5) Zero lot lines should be encouraged when ever appropriate and possible. Front parking and odd spaces can detract from the streetscape.
- 6) Strong consideration should be given to form based codes. What types of areas are they most appropriate for? How can a hybrid code work?
- 7) Consider creating a Transfer of Development (TDR) rights tool that could be used for building preservation and/or environmental preservation.
- 8) TDR might require decrease in underlying density which caused some concern about property rights.
- 9) Aesthetics make places worth living; consider a tool in a new zoning code that would include some simple basic design requirements aimed at preserving and maintaining building fronts with some historic standards. Maybe this could be an overlay district?
- 10) Could some Rehabilitation standards be in Zoning?
- 11) Create better coordination and transparency between zoning and local historic districts.

- 12) Make sure the new zoning code considers innovative Storm Water Management techniques that can improve the human experience.
- 13) Zoning should adopt greener standards for parking lots and parking design in general.
- 14) The preservation of neighborhood character should be considered in zoning, even if larger structures are built in row house neighborhoods they should complement the existing.
- 15) The “people character” of a neighborhood is important, consider whether zoning effects gentrification? And how could it preserve traditional neighborhood demographics but allow for redevelopment.
- 16) Consider clearer cross-referencing language in the Zoning Code for areas that are historic districts or landmarks.
- 17) Consider clearer standards for roof-top additions. Some general aspects of the current rowhouse addition guidelines could be used to make bulk of additions standard and more predictable.
- 18) Review bulk regulations very carefully in historic districts, including but not limited to, setbacks, heights and material choices.
- 19) Step-backs (of taller buildings) could be used to control the drastic look of new construction next to existing buildings. Zoning should not create an appearance of extreme differences in neighboring communities.
- 20) Rehabilitation and infill construction should be encouraged through a clear and simple process. The current process of zoning can encourage the use of new subdivided lots in undeveloped areas because of restrictions on rowhouse type lots.
- 21) Should this rewrite give zoning more power or trigger the creation of other tools, and leaving zoning strictly to land use and bulk?
- 22) Form-based codes are very practical in cohesive historic neighborhoods and may provide the predictability needed to encourage compatible new construction.
- 23) The original historic intentions of neighborhood designs (Olmstead plans) should be reviewed for areas that contain privately owned “open space” and other categories that were ignored in the 70’s and possibly forgotten over time. What are the plans and intentions for quasi-public spaces?
- 24) Where does maintenance of green infrastructure fit into the review process? The care of trees in neighborhoods and parks should not just be an issue when construction is taking place.



- 25) What will the new neighborhood role be in the review process?
- 26) The new zoning code should effectively encourage walkable neighborhoods through design proximity of uses to one another. Bike trails and other transit modes should work in conjunction with zoning.
- 27) The zoning code and building codes should be more interrelated. The building code is very specific about requirements in all construction, perhaps zoning could take on a role like this?
- 28) What effect can any change in parking regulations have on new construction in historic neighborhoods? Could new construction help absorb needed parking? Perhaps parking sharing between rehabs (condo conversion) and new construction should be encouraged?
- 29) What zoning methods can encourage a reduction in car use and possibly ownership?
- 30) Can the new zoning code help transition between the city and outlying county lines? Currently one structure can have two completely different requirements depending where city/county line intersects.
- 31) Can zoning preserve view corridors between larger developments, neighborhoods and the water, or other scenic views?
- 32) Land currently used as a type of public space should be evaluated to avoid confusion when development takes place. What is thought to be public could be private, and what is actually public might have never been specifically intended to be permanent open space.
- 33) If the zoning code rewrite is successful, in most cases PUDs should not be needed. Perhaps other overlay zones will always be needed, but not involve zoning, and be more predictable. Same for URP's controlling land use.
- 34) Development should meet the needs of the current city and not totally speculative in nature. Current tax payers are just as important as possible tax payers.
- 35) Environmental overlay zones should also be indicated in zoning, to help create a broader view about the effects of development.
- 36) Can this public process include a public presentation about the zoning methods used in other cities? Expand on the message that we are not the only city facing these issues, and that other places were able to improve.